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FM AMEMBASSY RABAT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6422  
INFO RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS IMMEDIATE 4394  
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN IMMEDIATE 0647  
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS IMMEDIATE 3059  
RUEHCP/AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN IMMEDIATE 0301  
RUEHHE/AMEMBASSY HELSINKI IMMEDIATE 0100  
RUEHLI/AMEMBASSY LISBON IMMEDIATE 1170  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE 3286  
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID IMMEDIATE 5703  
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW IMMEDIATE 0392  
RUEHMK/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT IMMEDIATE 3473  
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO IMMEDIATE 0181  
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA IMMEDIATE 0014  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE 4614  
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA IMMEDIATE 0219  
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME IMMEDIATE 1510  
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM IMMEDIATE 0211  
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE IMMEDIATE 0854  
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS IMMEDIATE 9267  
RUEHWR/AMEMBASSY WARSAW IMMEDIATE 0275  
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA IMMEDIATE 2974  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA IMMEDIATE 1035  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE 0694

C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 000744

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PBTS](#) [MO](#)

SUBJECT: WESTERN SAHARA: CONTINUING HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES

REF: A. 06 RABAT 01983

[1](#)B. 06 RABAT 02252

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Wayne J. Bush, reasons 1.4 (b) a  
nd (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Government of Morocco's (GOM) efforts to sell its autonomy plan within the Sahara may be complicated by continuing repression and reported violations of human rights, although some recent improvement may help their case. Local human rights observers continue to report GOM heavy-handed legal and security tactics, including trials of dissidents, arrests of young teen-agers, and abuse of prisoners. While the Sahrawi human rights activists are generally pro-Polisario, their reporting is often substantiated and is picked-up internationally. We have also established, however, that some of the reporting is flawed, including portraying as political crimes sabotage attacks on the conveyor belt. GOM sources have been increasingly forthcoming about arrests and trials. Nevertheless, due to informal restrictions on local press, difficulty of access for international press and the absence of a continuing responsible international presence in the Western Sahara, monitoring allegations of human rights abuses remains extremely difficult, but could be enhanced. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) The Sahrawi Association of Victims of Grave Human Rights Violations Committed by the Moroccan State (ASVDH) reported that on March 20, Elayzid Ben Ammar, Sheikh Ben Allal, Zougham Ghali, Bhaha Mohammed Salem, Mohammed Mouloud Elhajaj, and Baida Abdessalam were sentenced to three years in prison; Abdessalam Loumadi was sentenced to eighteen months; and, Banga Sheikh was sentenced to five months.

Sheikh was released as he had already spent five months in prison waiting for his trial. The trials of Elwali Amidan, Bashri Ben Taleb and Yahdi Etazrozi were postponed until April 17. On April 17, Amidan and Ben Taleb received five year sentences and Etazrozi received an eighteen month sentence. These reports, widely distributed to the international human rights community, did not convey the nature of the offenses.

13. (C) The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) readily supplied polloff with information on the Amidan and the Ben Taleb cases. The sentences were for the criminal act of attempting to destroy the phosphate conveyor belt system from the Boucraa mine to the port of Laayoune. Both men were convicted of forming a "criminal gang." Etazrozi's sentence was for inciting violence, including explosives, during demonstrations and complicity in the conveyor belt incident. (Note: A conveyor belt runs between the phosphate mine at Boucraa and the port of Laayoune. The phosphate industry remains a pillar of the Western Sahara economy and was targeted by the Polisario before the 1991 peace agreement. End Note.)

14. (C) The Wali (governor) of Laayoune, M'hammed Dryef, assured polcouns separately that the April 17 sentences were for criminal acts relating to the attempt on the phosphate conveyor belt. He maintained that conditions had improved but did not dispute that there were continuing problems. The wali also acknowledged April 24 the reported arrests of youths in Laayoune, but added that they had been quickly released. He pleaded that the separatists should refrain from agitating among junior high school aged youth. High school aged youth is "okay," but not twelve to thirteen year old youngsters, he said. Dryef also maintained that the reported "disappearance" of fifteen Sahrawi youth was because their boat was lost at sea in a migrant smuggling effort. He complained that the pro-Polisario activists had misused the mothers of the children to launch anti-government demonstrations in Laayoune.

14. (SBU) On March 6, Brahim Sabbar and Ahmed Sbai, both actively involved in ASVDH, were sentenced to one year in prison in Laayoune. Amnesty International (AI) condemned these sentences in a March 8 press release. AI believes that both men were peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. AI identified the men as "prisoners of conscience" and noted that the charges against Sabbar in particular were likely "trumped up." We have no grounds to dispute these claims.

15. (C) Polcouns met separately with Brahim Dahane, president of ASVDH, on April 19. When asked why ASVDH presented convictions for sabotage as human rights/political prisoner issues, Dahane justified it by saying that these were political acts not undertaken for personal gain. ASVDH is presenting a criminal act as a human rights violation. Brahim acknowledged that in recent months the human rights situation in the territory has improved. People, including junior high school aged children are being arrested, but are then released.

16. (C) Comment: These cases point to the difficulty of discerning the truth concerning human rights abuses affecting Sahrawis. Repression continues in the territory, as Embassy has reported in the past, but it is clear that there have been tangible improvements, even grudgingly acknowledged by the opposition. Some of the easing may be linked to a recent directive by the head of the national police, the DGSN, that police should enforce the law, but exercise restraint. Reducing repression and the perception thereof could help build confidence among those Sahrawis favoring independence in the bona fides of the Moroccan autonomy offer, but there is a substantial threshold to overcome.

17. (C) Comment continued: In the absence of a free press in the Western Sahara (even compared to national Moroccan press), with limited access by international press, and without a continuing responsible international community

presence, it is difficult to sort out these conflicting reports. We note multiple Moroccan media and other sources also report acts of repression and human rights violations in the Polisario-run camps, although we have seen no confirmation, due to similar absence of monitoring. The continued confusion about human rights reporting concerning Sahrawis on both sides of the berm suggests the need for enhanced monitoring of the Sahrawi human rights situation. Although it may be reluctant, the United Nations, may be the only organization with a presence on the ground in a position to provide more credible ongoing information regarding the human rights situation. We hear of continuing interest among northern European countries typically concerned about these issues. End Comment.

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